Variation at the edges:

A liminal approach to assessing social meaning in borderlands

Evan Hazenberg | University of Sussex

E.Hazenberg@sussex.ac.uk

Borders and language variation

- geographical borders and the perception of linguistic difference
  - Niedzielski (1999): inaccurate perception of vowels along US-Canadian border based on reported nationality of speaker
  - Montgomery (2014): psychological effect of border on perception of language variation
  - Llamas, Watt & MacFarlane (2016): production – marked differences across Scottish/English border; perception – salience estimated through shared social meaning within speech communities
- other 'borders' can also mark in/out-group status
  - ethnicity, class, religion, age, gender, etc.

Salience

- can be tricky to define within linguistics
  - for our purposes: interpretable social meaning
- indicators, markers, stereotypes (Labov 1972)
  - degree of awareness inferred from patterns of style shifting and degree of metalinguistic awareness
- BUT social correlation in variation and change doesn't always mean interpretable social meaning
  - stereotypes easy to identify – explicit commentary
  - indicators and markers – how to gauge degree of social meaning?
- perception studies: a lot of work, and rely on already having a good idea of strong candidates for carriers of social meaning

Liminality:
boundary-crossers as reliable sources of social meaning

- people are *liminal* with respect to a (geographic/social/other) border if they:
  - have crossed a socially recognised category boundary
  - are perceived as 'authentic' once across the boundary
    - …or are striving to be perceived as authentic (more in a minute)
- different from Rampton's 'crossing'
- this project:
  - border = gender (socially reified category boundary)
  - liminal people = transsexuals

Participants

- interviews in Auckland (2013-2015)
- native speakers of Pakeha NZE
- gendered social space
  - queer/straight
  - women/men
- age: reflective of major social changes in NZ in mid 1980s

	queer women	straight women	queer men	straight men	trans men	*total*
older	4	5	5	4		*18*
younger	4	5	5	4	5	*23*
total	*8*	*10*	*10*	*8*	*5*	*41*

→ impact of social change on linguistic performativity of gender

→ trans men as highly attuned to gendered meaning in speech community

Today's variables

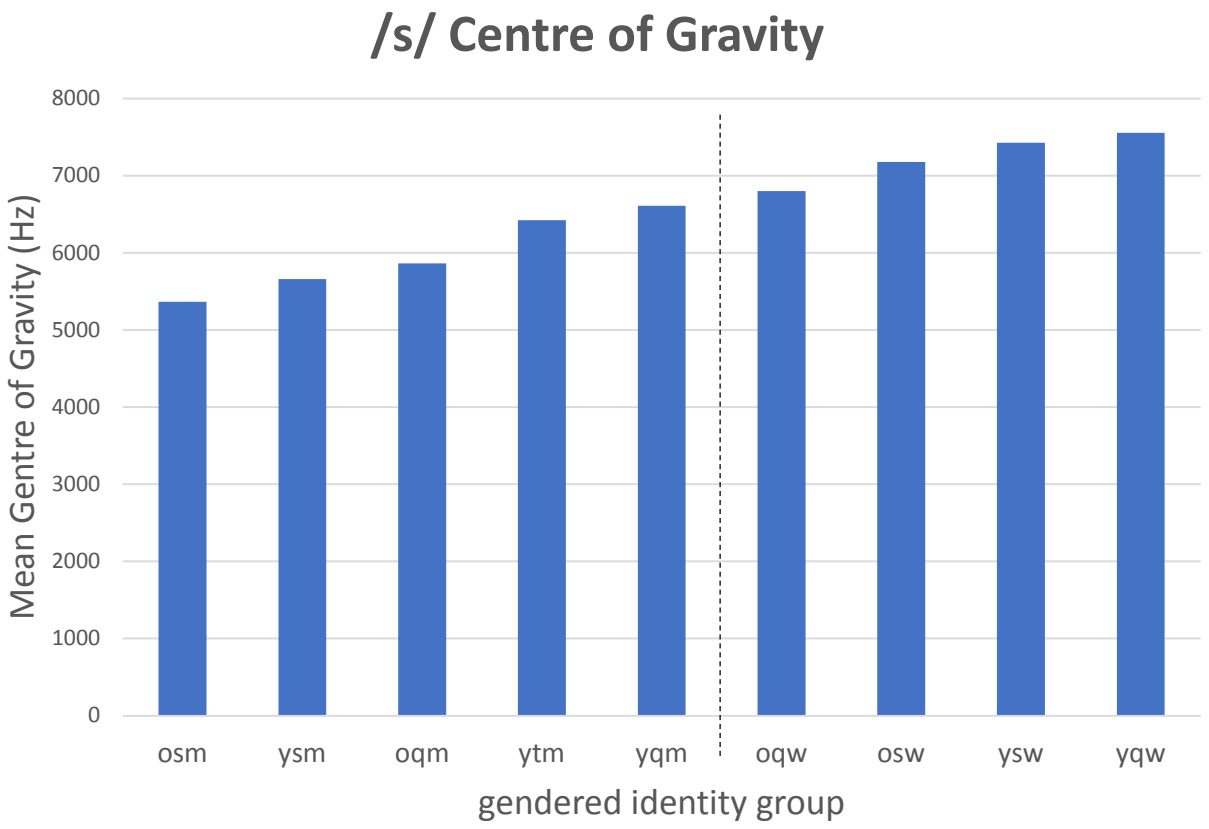
- sibilants: /s/ and /ʃ/
  - stereotypes of 'gay lisp' + exaggerated performances of camp masculinity and certain styles of young urban femininity → socially interpretable meaning (even if hard to articulate)
- four vowels: FACE, GOAT, FOOT, STRUT (cf. Wells 1982)
  - vowel system in NZE known to be undergoing change (e.g. Gordon et al. 2004)
  - not a lot of reported regional variation (but may be emerging – cf. Schneider's stage 5 *Differentiation*)
  - ethnic linguistic differences becoming more prominent (see Szakay 2012 for overview)

Sibilants

Multivariate analysis of /s/ CofG (Hz)			
Gender	coeff.	N	mean
yqw	958	1036	7468
ysw	933	1548	7307
osw	589	1437	7109
oqw	273	1007	6669
yqm	14	1512	6591
ytm	-114	1610	6380
oqm	-630	1357	5780
ysm	-880	1384	5609
osm	-1175	1580	5347
Range 2133		*p<0.001*	

Also retained as significant in model:

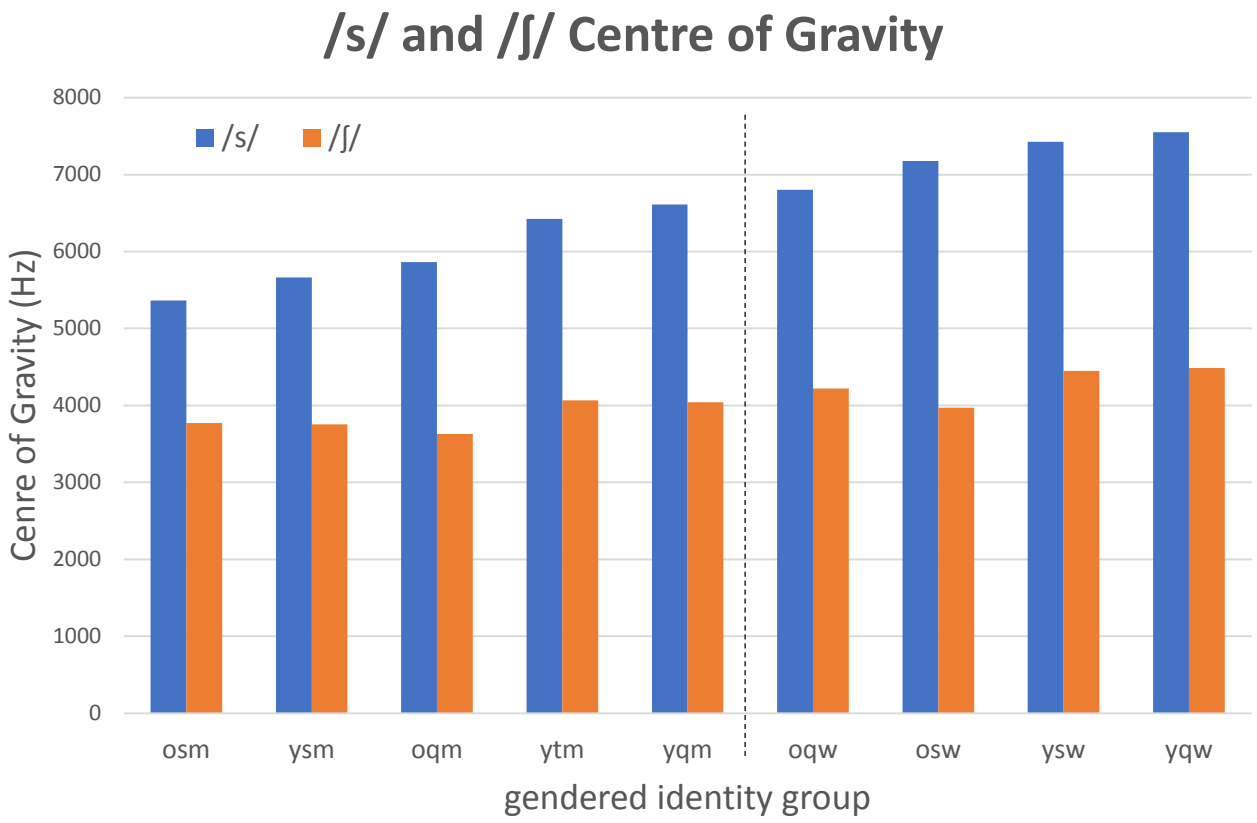
- Position in word (p<0.001)
- Preceding segment: manner (p<0.001)
- Preceding segment: place (p<0.001)
- Following segment (p<0.001)



Sibilants

Multivariate analysis of /ʃ/ CofG (Hz)
no social factors retained
Linguistic factors retained in model Position in word (p=0.004) Following segment: place*manner (p=0.007)

/ʃ/ Mean CofG		
Gender	N	Mean (Hz)
oqm	158	3631
oqw	155	4219
osm	184	3770
osw	284	3971
yqm	200	4043
yqw	159	4485
ysm	152	3755
ysw	199	4449
ytm	196	4066



Sibilants

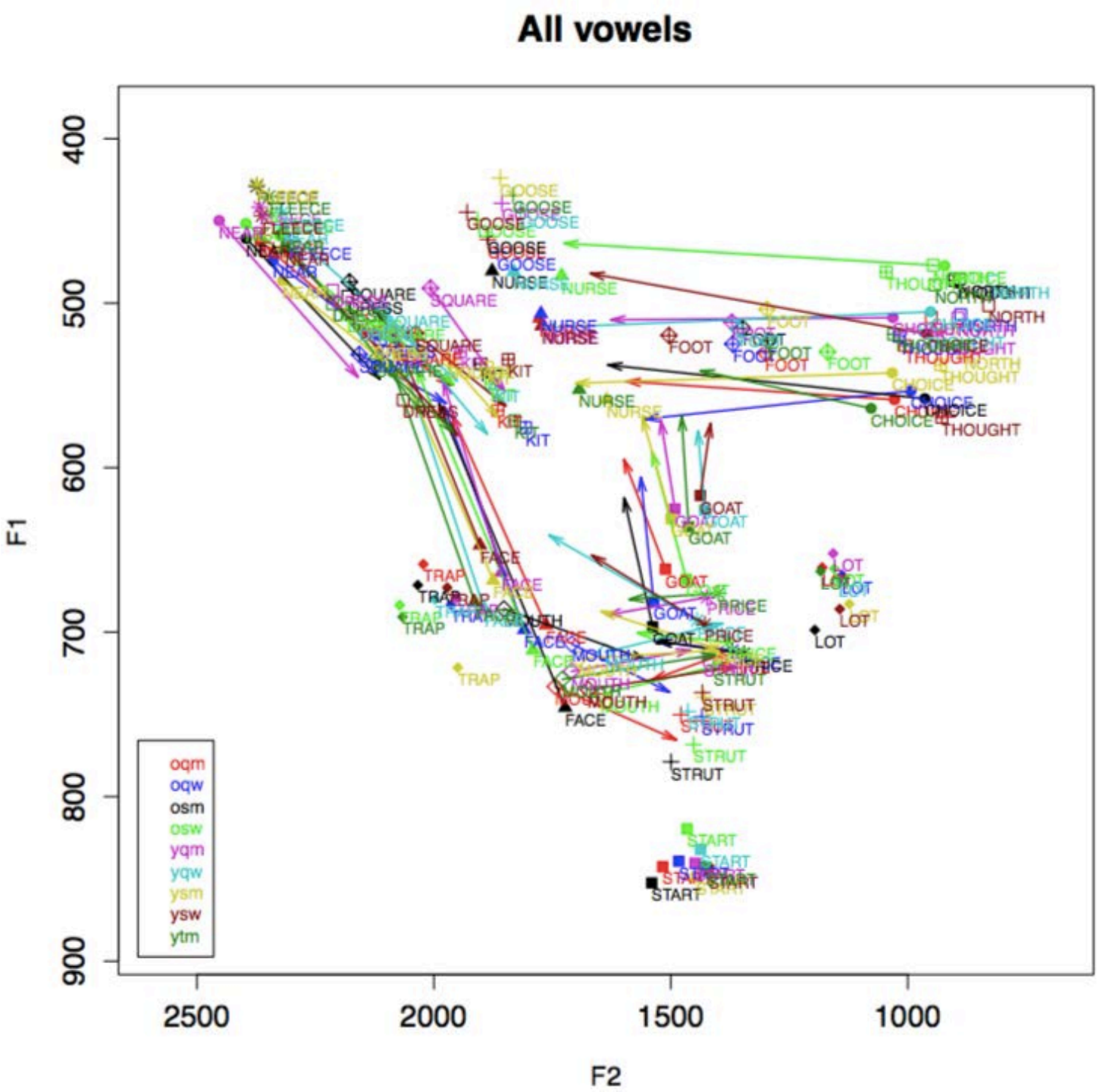
- /s/ carries interpretable gendered meaning in Auckland
  - stereotypes, metalinguistic commentary in interviews (esp. with older queer men)
  - trans men produce /s/ in alignment with their age-matched queer men counterparts
    - adapted as part of process of transition?
    - acquired in childhood/adolescence?

question for another study:
for now, enough that it does carry social meaning

- /ʃ/ carries no social meaning at all
- trans men liminal with respect to very interpretable social meaning
  - …how about with variables below level of conscious awareness?

Vowels

- vowel space crowded
- some vowels are relatively compactly spaced (e.g. START, LOT, FLEECE)
- others show clear differences between speaker groups
  - potential sites for gendered patterning



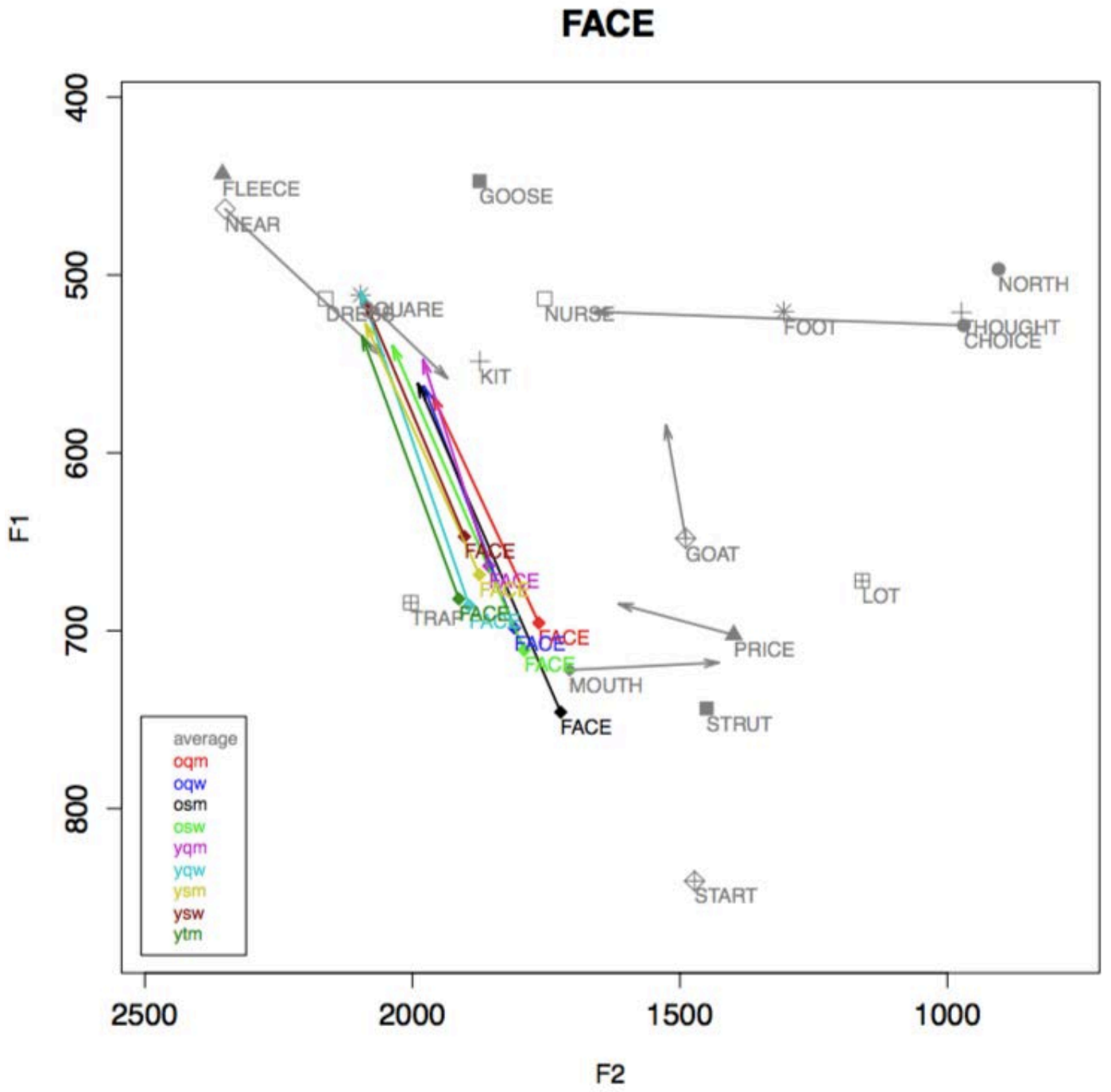
FACE

Multivariate analysis of FOOT onset [ED]			
Gender	Coef	N	Mean (Hz)
ysw	-65.421	463	511
ytm	-45.292	357	520
yqw	-42.4	239	532
ysm	-41.318	342	540
yqm	-19.358	359	553
oqw	27.533	232	612
osw	59.642	350	634
oqm	73.718	285	650
osm	111.284	427	706
Range	*176.705*	*p=0.001*	

Also retained as significant in model:

Preceding segment (p<0.001)

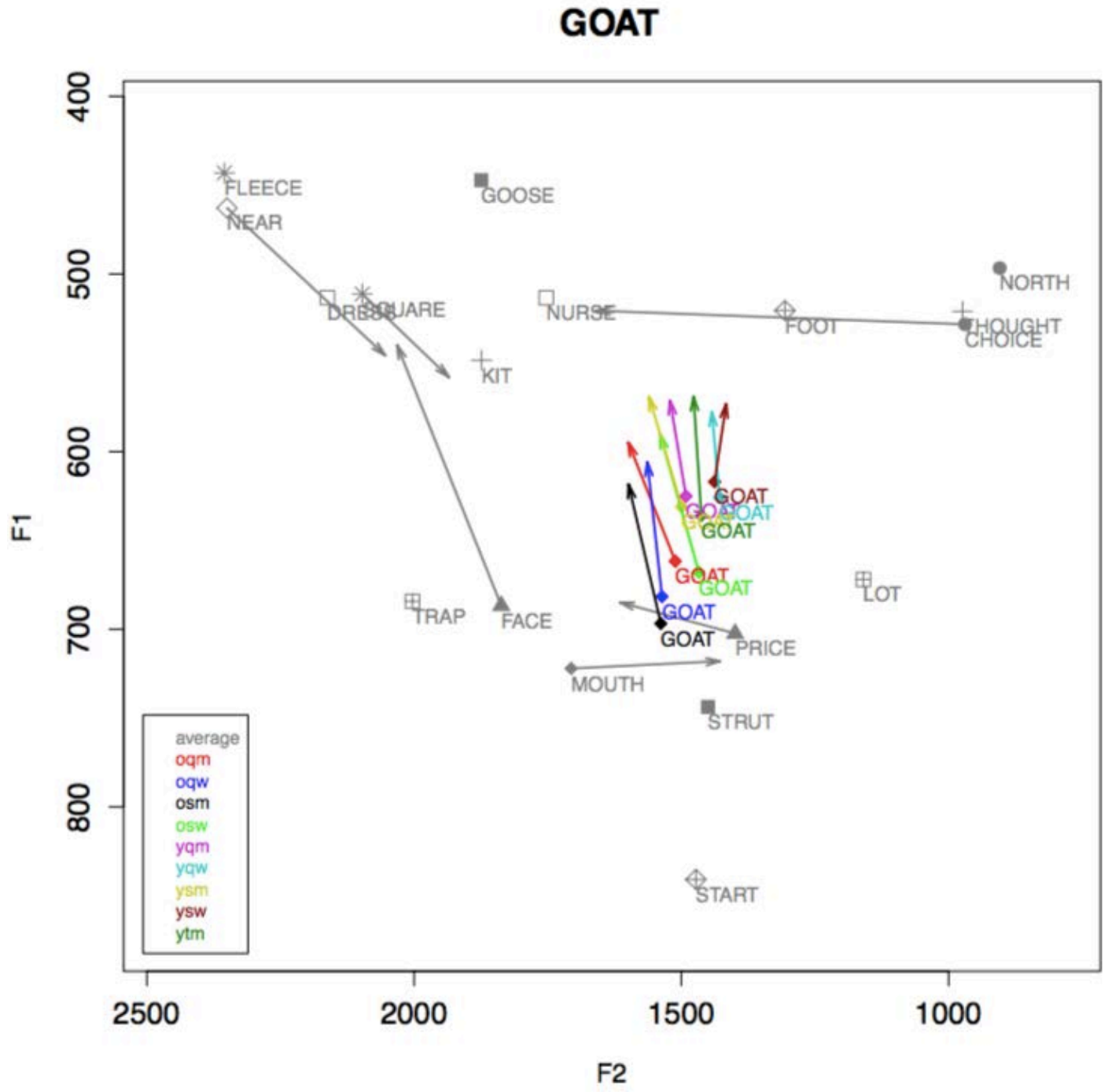
Following segment (p<0.001)



GOAT

Multivariate analysis of GOAT onset F1			
Gender	Coef	N	Mean (Hz)
ysw	-26.6	301	617
ysm	-23.219	228	631
yqm	-22.403	279	625
yqw	-19.678	190	626
ytm	-15.407	308	636
oqm	-0.577	194	662
osw	19.036	244	668
oqw	37.039	171	681
osm	45.959	285	697
Range	*72.559*	*p<0.001*	

Also retained as significant in model:
- Preceding segment (p<0.001)
- Following segment (p<0.001)



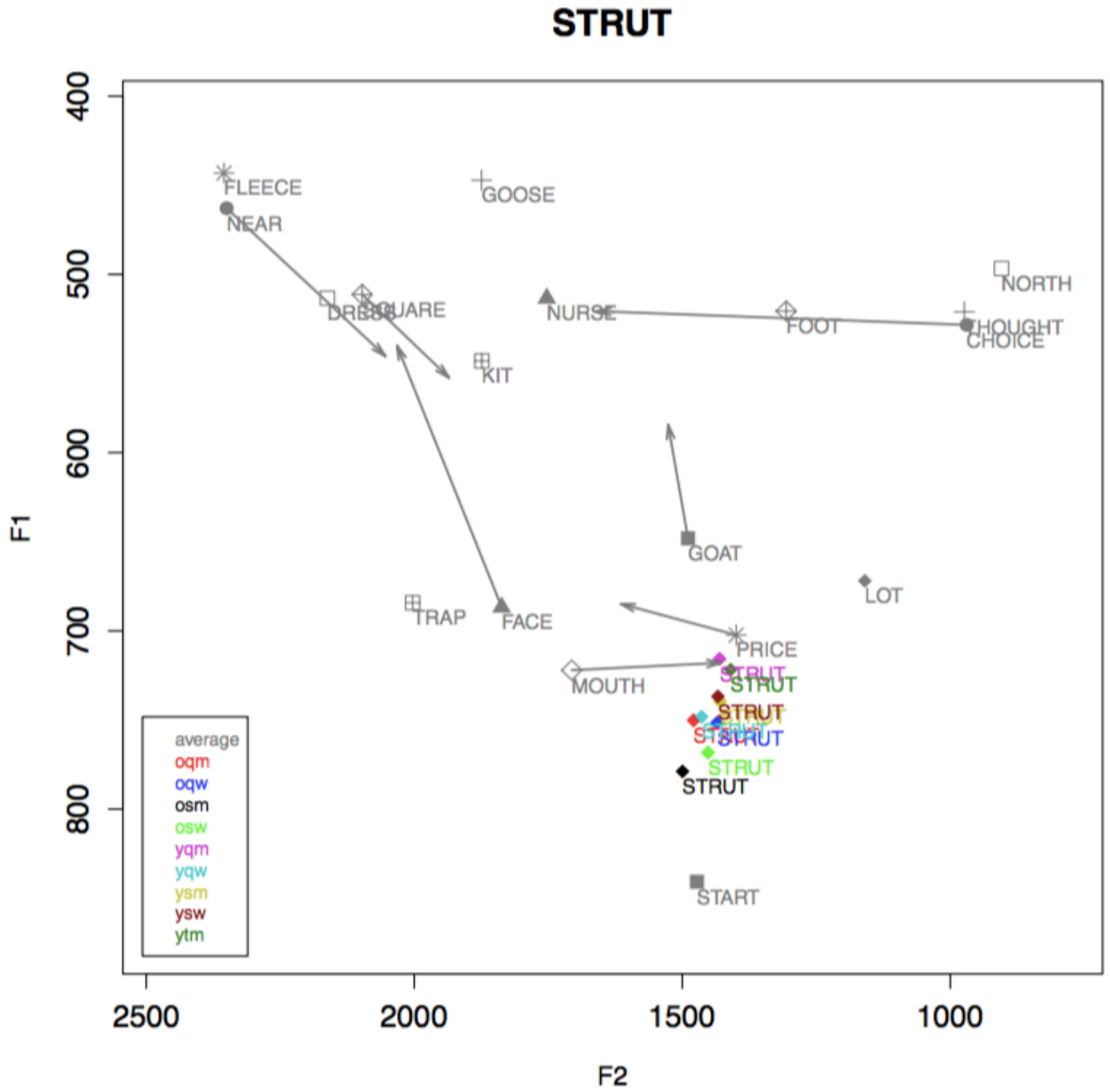
STRUT

Multivariate analysis of STRUT F1			
Gender	Coef	N	Mean (Hz)
yqm	-29.879	391	716
ytm	-23.951	432	722
ysm	-7.127	314	740
ysw	-7.087	404	737
yqw	-0.454	293	748
oqw	2.388	270	751
oqm	7.515	336	750
osw	26.105	342	768
osm	32.898	335	779
Range	*62.777*	*p<0.001*	

Also retained as significant in model:

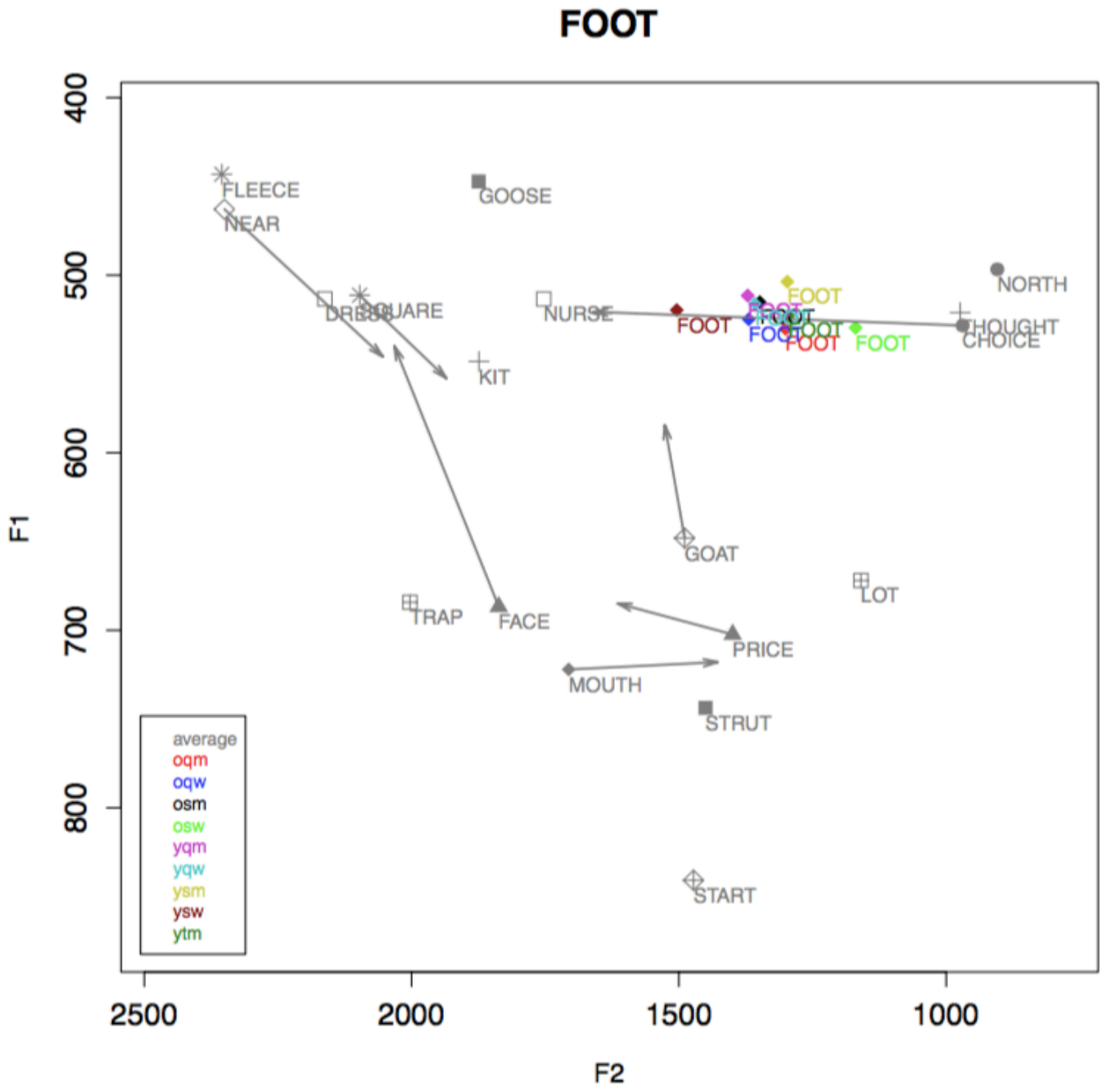
Preceding segment (p<0.001)

Following segment (p<p.001)



FOOT

Multivariate analysis of FOOT F2			
Gender	Coef	N	Mean (Hz)
osw	-91.988	63	1169
oqm	-39.74	30	1301
ysm	-9.545	28	1297
osm	9.368	58	1349
ytm	13.32	43	1295
oqw	34.133	29	1369
yqm	74.081	41	1371
yqw	79.097	42	1358
ysw	144.719	42	1504
Range	*236.707*	*p=0.015*	
Also retained as significant in model:			
Following segment (p<0.001)			



Vowels

- trans men patterning generally with their age group
  - changes to vowel space → age a relevant social factor overall
- trans men production of these vowels…
  - sometimes patterns with young women
  - sometimes patterns with young (esp. queer) men
    - all trans participants are active in queer community in Auckland, and align with *queer* as an important dimension of their identity

Trans men as liminal?

- we saw that trans men's productions were not uniformly consistent with either (cis) men or women
  - with stereotyped /s/
    - patterned as we might predict if trans men are sensitive to the social meaning of /s/
  - with vowels
    - FACE: straightforward Labovian change, trans men patterning with young women
    - GOAT: change in progress, gendered picture is less clear, trans men patterning with queer men and women in age cohort
    - STRUT, FOOT: trans men patterning with men
- if we are willing to accept that trans men are attuned to stereotypes, then they may also be attuned to less metalinguistically accessible (but still socially interpretable) gender cues

What next?

- triangulate these patterns – confirm ‘accuracy’ of trans men’s gendered production
  - perception studies?
- look for evidence that liminality approach works with social identities other than gender (and variables other than phonetic)
  - ethnicity? (2nd/3rd generation children of immigrants?)
  - geopolitical borders? (‘successful’ assimilation and integration?)
  - other social dimensions of identity? (class, region, etc.)
- why bother chasing after liminality?
  - quick-and-dirty identification of potential socially meaningful variation
  - typologies/models of socially-driven variation?

Thank you!

Evan Hazenberg | University of Sussex

E.Hazenberg@sussex.ac.uk

References

Gordon, Elizabeth, Lyle Campbell, Jennifer Hay, Margaret Maclagan, Andrea Sudbury & Peter Trudgill. 2004. *New Zealand English: Its origins and evolution*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Labov, William. 1972. *Sociolinguistic Patterns*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Llamas, Carmen, Domic Watt & Andrew E MacFarlane. 2014. Estimating the relative sociolinguistic salience of segmental variables in a dialect boundary zone. *Frontiers in Psychology* 7: 1163. doi 10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01163

Montgomery, Chris. 2014. Perceptual ideology across the Scottish/English border. In Watt & Llamas (eds.) *Language, Borders and Identity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 118-136.

Niedzielski, Nancy. 1999. The effect of social information on the perception of sociolinguistic variables. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 18(1): 62-85.

Rampton, Ben. 1995. *Crossing: Language and Ethnicity Among Adolescents*. Essex: Longman.

Schneider, Edgar. 2007. *Postcolonial Englishes: Varieties Around the World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Szakay, Anita. 2012. Voice quality as a marker of ethnicity in New Zealand: From acoustics ot perception. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 16(3): 382-397.

Wells, John Christopher. Accents of English 3: Beyond the British Isles. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.